

The Research on CAI Hongsheng's Academic Achievements and Characteristics of the History of Western Regions

Wang Gui Lian

PhD student of the National University of Uzbekistan Jining Normal University, China
1650758513@qq.com

Abstract: This article describes the famous Chinese historian Cai Hongsheng's life experience in detail, analyzes Mr. Cai's academic characteristics and achievements in the field of the Western Regions, and objectively evaluates his contributions in promoting academic development and cultivating talents.

Keywords: Cai Hongsheng, the Western Regions, history of Sino-foreign relations, academic achievements, academic characteristics.

Introduction. Cai Hongsheng was a famous historian and sinologist in China, an eminent master in the history of Sino-foreign relations, a former professor in the Department of History of Sun Yat-sen University. He was a knowledgeable and prolific scholar, had made marvelous achievements in the field of the Western Regions, the history of Sino-foreign relations, and Buddhist culture, also had made important contributions to the development of the discipline in modern Chinese history.

Life Experience. Cai Hongsheng was a famous modern Chinese historian, sinologist, and senior professor of the Department of History in Sun Yat-Sen University. His ancestral home was Waisha Town, Changhai County, Guangdong Province. In April 1933, He was born into an ordinary family in Shantou City, Guangdong Province. He was smart, diligent and eager to learn since childhood, and read lots of classic books, which laid a solid foundation for future academic creation. In 1953, Cai Hongsheng was admitted to Sun Yat-sen University and officially became a student of History Department. He began to receive professional education of history here, and had the honor to learn from the famous historians Chen Yinke and Cen Zhongmian.

In the field of Sui Tang history and Sino-foreign relations in the 20th century, Mr. Chen and Mr. Cen were renowned in the academic world. Chen Yinke inherited the scientific spirit of the QianJia scholars in the Qing Dynasty who laid emphasis on facts and evidence, and advocated that "from the outside to the inside, analyze the historical understanding layer by layer" [1]. Cen Zhongmian also thought highly of seeking truth from facts in his academic work, and verifying historical facts with gravestone inscriptions. He "not only expanded the research field, but also deepened the historical understanding, leaving a rich legacy for future generations" [2]. These famous historians, drew objective and accurate conclusions based on historical facts, which had a profound impact on Cai Hongsheng's academic styles.

In Sun Yat-sen University, Cai Hongsheng not only received the seriously teaching by Mr. Chen and Mr. Cen, but also had the opportunity to listen some wonderful lectures of famous scholars such as Zhu Jieqin and Jin Yingxi. After careful guidance from these teachers, Cai Hongsheng had a further understanding of how to better study history. For example, the distinctive feature of Zhu Jieqin's academic work was pioneering and innovation. Inspired by him, Cai Hongsheng was absorbed in filling the "academic gap" in the process of writing. He was always good at observing details and finding important things from the small, truly achieved that "said things that others had never said" [3], which had important academic significance.

After graduating in 1957, Cai Hongsheng stayed at the school as a teacher. For nearly 50 years since then, he insisted on teaching and educating students seriously, persisted in writing books and dissertation, presided over many major scientific research projects, actively participated in various academic activities, and made significant contributions to the development of the History Department at Sun Yat-sen University. In 1985, he was successfully selected to be a professor, and edited the journal of the *Grand View of history*. In 1986, he was elected as a director of the Chinese Society for Historians of China's foreign Relations. In 1991, because of prominent accomplishments, he had been appointed as the director of the Institute of Religious Culture and selected as a doctoral tutor. In 1996, he was invited to visit Lund University in Sweden and Oxford University in UK. In 2011, he was awarded the title of "The First Outstanding Social Scientist in Guangdong Province". He passed away at the age of 88 in February 2021 in Guangzhou.

Cai Hongsheng had been engaged in teaching and researching on the Sino-foreign relations for a long time, he cultivated many masters and doctoral students, and sent plentiful brilliant talents to the society. Cai Hongsheng's relatives, friends and teachers all had an important influence on his academic activities. In addition, he had devoted himself to research and educating students, therefore, he had a number of excellent works.

Academic Achievements. Cai Hongsheng was an industrious scholar, he dedicated to learning and writing, had made great achievements in the history of Sino-foreign relations, and been highly praised by international academic circles. He had written a lot and published more than 15 monographs, mainly including: *Research on the History of Sino-foreign Exchanges, Jiu Xing Hu and Turkic Culture in Tang Dynasty, Accounts of Russian Hostel Revised and Enlarged Edition, Records of Guangzhou Maritime Affairs, Selected Works of Cai Hongsheng, Cai Hongsheng's Historical Essays, Reading History and Seeking Knowledge, the Realm of Learning, Looking Up to Chen Yinqu* and so on. He published more than 70 theses, prefaces and notes, mainly including: *A Study of the Rites and Customs of Jiu Xing Hu in the Tang Dynasty, Discrimination of Turkic Historical Affairs of Serving Buddha, Material Records of Turkic Prescription* and so on. Responsible for editing publications including *Grand View of History, Guangzhou and Marine Civilization, History of Macao and Research on Chinese and Western Transportation*. This article focuses on Mr. Cai's academic achievements in the history of the Western Regions.

"Western Regions, is the special name for the northwest frontier of ancient China in Chinese historical books" [4]. Its scope "has no obvious boundary in Chinese history" [5]. In different periods, the scope of the Western Regions often changed greatly or slightly. Generally speaking, the Western Regions have a broad and a narrow sense. "The narrow sense of the Western Regions mainly refers to the Central Asian region with Tianshan Mountains as the core" [6]. The Western Regions in the broad sense include South Asia, West Asia, even North Africa and Europe in addition to the narrow sense. Since the ancient Western Regions was not only a region of national migration and integration, but also a central hub of cultural exchange between the East and the West, the research of the Western Regions is an international knowledge involving a variety of disciplines.

Cai Hongsheng's research on the Western Regions concentrated on the history and culture of the Sogdian, Turk and other nationalities in the Tang Dynasty. Based on the method of mutual verification of documents, he discussed the systems, etiquette and customs, religions, languages and products of various nationalities in the middle ages and their relations with the Han nationality. Jiu Xing Hu was the appellation of the commercial nation of Sogdians in Central Asia in ancient Chinese historical books. The sogdians were the media that communicated the ancient civilizations of West Asia, South Asia and East Asia. The Turkic nation was a general name of ethnic groups active in the Mongolian plateau and Central Asia in history. The brave turks established the Turkic Khanate with vast territory. This was "a multi-tribal, multi-ethnic military administrative union." [7].

Cai Hongsheng indicated that although the Sogdian and Turkic ethnic groups had their own characteristics, they were closely linked in politics, economy and culture. For example, Sogdians relied on the power of Turks to engage in production and trade, Turks used Sogdians as political and diplomatic envoys for commercial activities, the two ethnic groups intermarried and have similar customs. The Sogdians and the Turks both had great influence on China in the Sui and Tang Dynasties. These two nationalities not only occupied an important position in Chinese history, but also could not be ignored in the world's ancient history. Cai Hongsheng creatively linked the oasis city-state civilization of Central Asia represented by Sogdians, with the grassland civilization created by Turks as an independent cultural entity, which was very insightful.

Cai Hongsheng's arguments had a clear logic and rich content. The study of Sogdians' customs from the aspects of diet, clothing, marriage and funeral made people had a better understanding of Sogdians' cultural characteristics. Similarly, the legal system, military organization and social customs of Turkic culture were deeply studied from two aspects of spiritual and material culture. The material was richer and the discussion was more solid, which made a deep exploration of many unique Turkic products that had been ignored in historical books, enriched the readers' understanding of the Turkic nomadic civilization, and enabled us to have a profound comprehension of Turkic history.

In addition, Cai Hongsheng also laid stressed on the study of species and cultural exchanges in the Western Regions. He focused on the spread of western species to the east and cultural exchanges, and elaborated on the process and evolution of species such as lions, pugs, and ferghana horses in China. For example, the pugs were introduced from the Western Regions in the Tang Dynasty. Mr. Cai introduced its origin, species and characteristics in detail in his books, and described the evolution process of pugs from dynasty tribute to folk pets. He stated that pugs were intelligent and enthusiastic, could adapt to different living conditions, and were loyal friends of human beings, which made Chinese' lives more colorful and had a far-reaching implication.

Analysis of Cai Hongsheng's scientific works. Cai Hongsheng was a modest and rigorous scholar with extensive knowledge. He had written many books and made great achievements in academic research. He was meticulous in his studies and had unique characteristics.

Firstly, Cai Hongsheng advocated meditation and contemplation, seeking truth from vulgarity. That is to say, we should constantly overcome impetuosity, be able to sit on the bench, endure loneliness, and do not blindly pursue the trend. He had been advising youngsters to get rid of rashness and vulgarity, not to be too keen on publishing articles, but to settle down to read books, and accumulated solidly. However, being cautious do not mean sticking to convention. Cai Hongsheng often told students to give full play to strengths and be creative. However, "true innovation is not about doing what you want, but respecting the facts"[8].

Secondly, Cai Hongsheng advocated research materials should be complete and detailed. At the same time, "research based on literature interpretation"[9].

He paid attention to mutual verification of documents. As we all know, history materials were the main references for conducting research. However, due to various reasons, documents were often missing or recorded incorrectly. Therefore, only by using many different types of historical materials as far as possible can historical distortions be avoided.

Taking Cai Hongsheng's representative work *Jiu Xing Hu and Turkic Culture in Tang Dynasty* as an example, the book used a wealth of historical materials, including ancient city ruins, epitaphs and diverse unearthed cultural relics; historical documents include political documents, buddhistic classics, etc. More importantly, foreign language historical materials were also cited for mutual reference. The book cited Russian, English, French and even Sogdian, Turkic and other documents, accounting for about half of all the materials were used, this reflected Cai Hongsheng's global historical view.

Thirdly, Cai Hongsheng attached importance to finding big things through small ones. He believed that the magnitude of the topic was not equal to the magnitude of significance, the key point lied in the depth of the study and the appropriateness of research methods. If the topic was big and empty, the conclusion was definitely not accurate. On the contrary, some small topics were solid and meticulous, and there were very few people who researched them, hence small topics could fill the gaps in academic research. But there was a premise that the study of small topics was based on extensive background knowledge and strict logical thinking.

When discussing the species of Western Regions in cultural exchanges, Cai Hongsheng paid special attention to the historical fate of the lion and wrote an article *Lion in China* to demonstrate. From a macroscopic point of view, lions were insignificant, but why did Cai Hongsheng attach importance to this? Because at the intersection of Western Regions culture and Chinese culture, as a tribute of the Western Regions, the lion was rejected by the authorities for many times because it was only ornamental rather than practical. However, as a lucky animal image, the lion had spread to different areas of Chinese cultural lives and became a symbol of good luck. “The history of the lion in China had typical significance for researching the transformation of material and spiritual systems in cultural dissemination process, as well as the integration of foreign and local cultures” [10].

Cai Hongsheng also advocated erudition. He repeatedly expounded on this view: reading was like eating, and we should read numerous books so that nutrition could be balanced, but must understand to integrate. These experiences of our predecessors have inspired us greatly.

Conclusion. As a prominent historian, Cai Hongsheng had plentiful achievements, sparing no effort to cultivate youngsters. He combined theory with practice, devoted himself to academic research and education, made breakthroughs in the field of Sino-foreign relations, religious and regional history research, and also sent a large number of outstanding talents to the society. At the same time, he gave full play to his strengths, actively made practical suggestions for the protection of the Western Regions’ culture and the application of the Maritime Silk Road to the World Heritage List, and donated many cultural relics and precious books to give back to the society, reflecting the responsibility of a historian.

References

1. Cai Hongsheng. The charm of Chen Yinke’s Historiography [J]. Academic Research, 2000, 109p.
2. Cai Hongsheng. Cen Zhongmian’s academic style of research on Chinese and foreign history and geography [J]. Journal of Jinan University, 2005. 94p.
3. Cai Hongsheng. Jiu Xing Hu and Turkic Culture in Tang Dynasty [M]. Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1998. p270.
4. Tian Weijiang. The concept and connotation of the Western Regions [J]. The Western Regions Studies, 1998, 67p.
5. Zeng Xiangwu. History of Chinese Management of Western Regions [M]. Urumqi: Xinjiang People’s publishing House, 2013. 165p.
6. Hua Tao. Research on the history of the Western Regions — eighth to tenth centuries [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2000. 156p.
7. Chavannes, translated by Feng Chengjun. Western Turkic History [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2016. 1p.
8. Cai Hongsheng. the Realm of Learning [M]. Guangzhou: Sun Yat-sen University Press, 2007. 13p.
9. Cai Hongsheng. Literature interpretation and cultural studies [J]. Social Sciences Guangdong, 2004, 13p.
10. Cai Hongsheng. Historiography by Cai Hongsheng [M]. Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2014. 705p.